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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000210

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SUBJECT: UNDAUNTED BY INTERNAL DISCORD, UPR OPPOSITION
PARTY PREPARES FOR ELECTIONS

REF: CONAKRY 0131

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The president of the UPR opposition party assured Poloff that he remains the party's legitimate leader, irregardless of recent party declarations to the contrary. He attributes the internal dissension to a handful of members who want to ally with the UFDG and Cellou Diallo. Having just returned from a month-long campaign through Middle Guinea, Bah was skeptical as to whether transparent elections can be organized by the end of year, if at all. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Despite having been publicly dismissed from his position as party president (reftel), Ousmane Bah of the Union for Progress and Renewal (UPR) opposition political party told Poloff on May 12 that he is still in charge since the majority of the party's membership is opposed to the decision. The UPR is the only opposition party represented in the National Assembly, and as the head of the party, Ousmane Bah is the minority leader within the Guinean Parliament.

STILL THE HEAD OF PARTY

13. (SBU) Bah classified the recent dissent within the party as an "old problem." He said that there is a continuing debate as to who should lead the party and in what direction. According to Bah, members of the UPR's executive bureau met in October 2007 to discuss these issues, and in particular, the possibility of forming a political alliance with Cellou Diallo's Union Force Democratic Guinean (UFDG) party. Bah told Poloff that a handful of members wanted to ally with the UFDG, but that the executive bureau decided to remain autonomous. Bah said that his recent "dismissal" was orchestrated by a dozen members of the party's executive bureau who want to push for the alliance with the UFDG, to be led by Cellou Diallo.

14. (SBU) In response to a question about the party's internal governing structure, Bah said that the executive bureau consists of 75 statutory members, but that in reality, there are about 120 active members, although he did not clarify the roles of these 45 non-statutory members. Bah said that the group pushing for his dismissal and the alliance with the UFDG represents only a small fraction of the party leadership and therefore, cannot unilaterally make a decision that affects the entire party. Bah assured Poloff that he remains the legitimate, democratically selected head of party. He also said that he had filed paperwork with the Ministry of Interior and Security to clarify the situation, but that he has not yet received a response.

15. (SBU) COMMENT. During a May 13 meeting with the PM on

elections (septel) Bah was the only head of party present as all of the other major parties sent deputy members to the meeting. At one point, another political party referred to Bah as the UPR representative, to which Bah jokingly, but loudly, affirmed "not the representative, the president!"
END COMMENT.

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

¶6. (SBU) Noting that Bah had just returned from a month long road trip in Middle Guinea, Poloff asked about the UPR's political campaign and elections preparations. Bah said that the UPR is not officially campaigning at this point because Guinean law forbids campaigning until two months before Election Day. He said that his main objective was to get a sense of how things are progressing at the local level and to begin raising awareness about upcoming elections. Bah said he traveled extensively in Middle Guinea, which represents the party's largest constituent base (primarily from the Peuhl/Fulani ethnic group), and that he plans to travel throughout the rest of the country in the coming months.

¶7. (SBU) Bah mentioned that he had participated in a large political rally in Conakry on May 10, which was reportedly organized by his supporters. (COMMENT. Several Embassy employees noted the large gathering and an Embassy contact provided photographs of motorcycle brigades and hundreds of people wearing t-shirts displaying Ousmane Bah's profile. END COMMENT). When asked how he is financing the party's activities, Bah said that he gets "local donations" and that

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the UPR deputies to the National Assembly also provide financial support.

NOT SURE ABOUT ELECTIONS

¶8. (SBU) Regarding general elections preparations, Bah told Poloff "between you and I, absolutely nothing is ready." He said that the most urgent need is a public education campaign to inform potential voters. In addition, he said that although the local electoral commissions have been set up, they lack resources, and there is a general sense of confusion about who is responsible for what (i.e. local authorities versus electoral commissions). Bah was critical of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), saying that the results of the elections will illustrate whether the Commission is truly independent or not.

¶9. (SBU) Bah told Poloff that he is not convinced that the elections will take place in 2008. "People want good elections, but we need to be at least 80% sure that we can have them." When asked to clarify, Bah said that if organizational issues pose problems for transparency and credibility, it would be preferable to postpone the date rather than to go forward with elections that will likely be flawed.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Despite Ousmane Bah's personal misgivings about the potential for transparent elections in 2008, the UPR is the only political party that currently looks to be preparing a political strategy, at least overtly. There has been quite a bit of talk and intermittent press coverage regarding Cellou Diallo and the UFDG, who are rumored to be spending significant amounts of money as he gears up his campaign. The UFDG and the UPR will be competing for the same voter base, and Ousmane Bah's decision to spend some time in the Middle Guinea likely represents a calculated political

measure to try and shore up his support. Bah told Poloff that the UPR will participate in transactions even if it looks like they will not be transparent. END COMMENT.

CARTER